

PR  
1119  
E5  
no.95

UNIV. OF  
TORONTO  
LIBRARY







461

# The Legend of the Holy Grail.

---

Early English Text Society.

Extra Series. No. xcv.

1905.

BERLIN : ASHER & CO., 13, UNTER DEN LINDEN.  
NEW YORK : C. SCRIBNER & CO.; LEYPOLDT & HOLT.  
PHILADELPHIA : J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.

The Legend of the Holy Grail,  
its Sources, Character and Development,

BY

DOROTHY KEMPE.

---

THE INTRODUCTION TO, AND PART V OF,  
HERRY LOVELICH'S VERSE 'HISTORY OF THE HOLY GRAIL,'  
EARLY ENGLISH TEXT SOCIETY, 1874, -5, -7, -8.

---

LONDON:

PUBLISHED FOR THE EARLY ENGLISH TEXT SOCIETY  
By KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER & CO., LIMITED,  
DRYDEN HOUSE, 43, GERRARD STREET, SOHO. W.

1905

3.852  
913.4

PR  
1115  
E5  
no. 55

Extra Series, XCV.

RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED, LONDON AND BUNGAY



# GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

BY DOROTHY KEMPE.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| § 1. <i>The Character and Development of the Grail Legend</i> , p. v.<br>§ 2. <i>The Sources of the Grail Cycle of Romance</i> , p. vi.<br>§ 3. <i>The Christian Legendary Portion of the Grail Cycle: The Conte del Graal</i> , p. viii. | § 4. <i>Robert de Borron and the Prose Romances</i> , p. xiv.<br>§ 5. <i>The Sources of the 'Grand St. Graal,'</i> p. xvii.<br>§ 6. <i>The Brandan Legend &amp; the 'Grand St. Graal,'</i> p. xxii.<br>§ 7. <i>The Bleeding Lance and Joseph of Arimathea</i> , p. xxxii. |
|---|---|

## § 1. THE CHARACTER AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE GRAIL LITERATURE.

§ 1. THE critical work of the last forty years, and in particular the revival of interest in the remains of early Celtic literature, whether Welsh or Irish, has placed the study of the Arthurian Romances upon a somewhat different basis to that which it occupied when the *History of the Holy Grail*, in Lovelich's metrical rendering, was first published in 1861, and necessitates some further words of introduction to the present edition. These studies have not indeed solved all difficulties of detail, but they have provided an acceptable solution for the general problem; they have invested our well-loved tales with an even more venerable halo of antiquity; they have made more peculiarly our own that "*matière de Bretagne*" to which alien learning had sometimes laid claim, by associating its origins with the primitive religion of early inhabitants of our islands.

The Arthurian Literature, in its manifold phases, represents in a unique manner the intellectual growth of a people: it mirrors from a remote past dark pictures of bloodshed and revenge; it reflects the age of courtly chivalry and the romance of Crusading days; the fervid morality of the monk; the activity and enterprise of the Elizabethan Age; the idealism of the nineteenth century.

To the modern mind it is seen, in Lovelich's version, in the least attractive stage of its growth, for as a literary monument, or as a work of art, his *History of the Holy Grail* is valueless. The interest of the so-called *Grand St. Graal*, and hence of its English rendering, lies in the fact that it is the principal witness remaining to us of a strange and anomalous phase in the development of the *Graal Literature*, namely, the introduction of the Christian Legendary element. It was no doubt owing to this fresh graft that the ancient tales made

so powerful an appeal to the mediæval mind, and that the growth of the cycle was so long continued. But at first the fusion of the new material with the old remained incomplete : in Lovelich's poem, as in its prose original, the combination from an artistic point of view spelt disaster. It was left for the master hand of Malory, in an age when myth and mysticism had become alike echoes from an unrealized past, to bring the jarring elements into final harmony. It is from his pages also that 'Solomon's Ship,' the 'Sword of Strange Hangings,' and the 'Turning Isle' which he took over from the prose romance, the *Queste del San Graal*, have become familiar to the general reader.

Lovelich writes of the ship "wondirly fair and riche," of the sword with its handle made of serpent scales and the bone of a fish of the Euphrates, and of the *Yl Torneawnt*. But, as always, he proves himself no story teller, and his version of the famous episodes may be commended with the rest of his voluminous and incoherent ramblings, to a merciful oblivion.

The problems connected with the Celtic originals of the Grail legend, both in their Welsh and Irish forms, have been so fully and satisfactorily dealt with by Mr. Nutt in his '*Studies in the Legend of the Holy Grail*,' and in part also by Professor Rhys in his '*Arthurian Romance*,' that I do not propose to enter anew into the discussion ; but while briefly re-stating the position as they leave it, to treat in somewhat greater detail the problems specially connected with the version now before us.

This version is a translation into rhymed couplets of the French Prose Romance known to critics of the cycle as the *Grand St. Graal*. The translation was made about 1450 by one Herry Lovelich,<sup>1</sup> a London skinner.

## § 2. THE SOURCES OF THE GRAIL CYCLE OF ROMANCE.

The material of that body of literature known as the Grail Romances has been shown by careful analysis to consist, broadly speaking, of two main elements.

To the more important of the two belongs a basis of Celtic popular tradition ; to the less considerable a basis of Christian

<sup>1</sup> His name was Lorelich, not Lonelich. Dr. Henry Bradley, when editing the L words for the Oxford Dictionary, found that 'lonely' did not exist as early as 1440 A.D., and therefore urged that 'Lonelich' ought to have been printed 'Lovelich.' Dr. Furnivall referred the point to Dr. Reginald Sharpe, the Record-Clerk at the Guild-Hall, and he at once settled it by producing extracts from his records, showing that Henry Lovelich was a citizen of London and a member of the Skinners' Company.

Legend. As might be expected, given their very diverse character, the combination of these elements is at first a merely tentative one, and only as time goes on, and the material is re-cast and re-handled, does the fusion become more or less complete.

But so composite in character are the Romances, that to discover their two chief constituents is but to take a first step in analysis. Turning first to the element of Celtic popular tradition, we are met by further complications. Here is no logical series of incidents, centring round the person of a single hero. The 'Quest of the Holy Grail' has played a large part in imaginative literature, but the romancers themselves wrote with no clear idea of what that Quest meant. The conception which they have in common can be stated only in the barest outline, and implied no more than "the hero's visit to a magic castle, his omission while there to do certain things, the loss and suffering thereby entailed." And this simple series of incidents may be found not once but many times in the work of the same writer; the hero of it is not always the same person—now Perceval, now Gawain, now Galahad fills the rôle. Sometimes the visitor is seeking revenge for the murder of a kinsman of his own, sometimes he is charged with the release from spells and enchantment of the inmates of the castle; there is besides endless and bewildering variety of detail. The popular idea of a 'Quest' seems indeed rather to have resulted from the accidental coherence of certain minor incidents than to have been from the first the great central conception of the Romances, and there is the same kind of indefiniteness about the nature and properties of the magic vessel.

No theory of authorship, in the ordinary sense of the word, seems to meet all the difficulties of the case. The remains of Celtic Literature as they exist outside the cycle afford, however, valuable clues. Many of the episodes which are built into the Romances are found elsewhere, in quite different surroundings. Such, for example, is the account of the birth and upbringing of Perceval (or Peredur), given in the Romances of Chrestien de Troyes and the Mabinogi of Peredur, son of Evrawc. This episode figures not only in the Celtic, but in the Heroic Literature of all Aryan races as far as known. There is no tale extant in which such a vessel as the Grail plays a prominent part; but vessels with magic properties, cauldrons of knowledge and increase, and jars which hold the ointment of healing or of restoration to life, play a

subsidiary part in very many such tales. To this fact its presence in the Cycle was originally due; its important position among the instruments of magic found there arose out of its gradual identification with the Christian Cup of Blessing, and was the chief result of the intrusion of the secondary or Christian element.

The Grail Romances were in fact the outcome of centuries of imaginative growth; the Romancers bound into sheaves what had been sown under other skies. The character of the whole body of romance is best understood when its most prominent member, the 'Conte del Graal,' is regarded as "a North-French re-telling of popular tales long current in Britain, and probably also among the Celtic inhabitants of Brittany, and the idea of any definite Grail Legend is abandoned."<sup>1</sup>

### § 3. THE CHRISTIAN LEGENDARY PORTION OF THE GRAIL CYCLE: THE CONTE DEL GRAAL.

No member of the Grail group of Romances, not even the Mabinogi of Peredur, in which the Grail as such does not appear, is entirely free from the influence of Christian Legend, though in the earlier Romances there is little or no attempt at amalgamating it with the material drawn from Celtic popular tales. Can any attempt be made to say where and with whom this strange feature originated? A short survey of existing material may help us to find an answer to this question.

We meet with it at the very outset of our examination in the 'Conte del Graal,' a composite poem which, in form if not in substance, contains the oldest work remaining to us. The earliest portion of the Conte del Graal to which it is possible to attach the author's name, is the work of Chrestien de Troyes. In the Mons MS. of the Conte del Graal, and in that alone, Chrestien's poem is preceded by a passage first distinguished by sixteenth century commentators as "the Elucidation." There is no proof that the Elucidation was known to Chrestien, or that he made use of it in any way, but it is in itself of great interest, for it is not only eloquent of the great body of tradition now lost to us, but it suggests much re-handling of older material prior to Chrestien's attempt. The author of the Prologue draws out under seven headings the plan of an elaborate composition: "Now the court was found seven times, and each time shall have a fresh tale." The question of

<sup>1</sup> Nutt, p. 170.

special interest to us is, what was included, or what was to have been included, in the seventh and most pleasing portion of the work, which told of "the lance wherewith Longis pierced the side of the King of Holy Majesty." Upon this Chrestien throws no light. As far as his portion of the Conte del Graal is concerned the legendary element is entirely absent. Percival, the hero, is instructed by his mother in the doctrines of the Church, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Holy Prophet, His Death upon the Cross, and His Crown of Thorns. There is a reference also to the penitents of Good Friday. But those objects which later on become the centres of Christian Legend, Grail and Lance, have as yet no sacred significance. A squire brings in a bleeding lance; the Grail appears borne by a damsel and shining beyond the light of stars; but Perceval does not ask the meaning of either apparition.

We pass on to the portion of the Conte del Graal which belongs to Wauchier de Denain or Donaing, who took up the thread of the Story where Chrestien laid it down. For the purposes of argument the following adventure which Wauchier ascribes to Gawain must be repeated in detail.

Gawain dresses himself in the armour of an unknown knight, slain by invisible hands at Arthur's court. Riding through Brittany and Normandy he comes to a castle, where, owing to the armour he wears, he is hailed as lord. In one room he sees a knight lying on a bier, with a cross and broken sword on his body. Whilst at table he sees the Grail serving out bread and wine to the knights, and also a lance bleeding into a silver cup. A knight brings him the broken sword, and asks him to put together the pieces, which he cannot do. He then asks about lance, sword, and bier, and is told the lance is that with which Christ was pierced in the side, and that it will bleed till Domesday. Before the tales of cup and sword can be told, Gawain falls fast asleep, and finds himself on the sea-shore, and the country, before desolate, now bursting into green leaf; this has happened because he asked about the lance; the country-folk bless him for this, but curse him for not completing their deliverance by asking about the Grail.

The adventure is found in all the MSS., but the Mons MS. and two others (B. N. 12576 and N. A. 6614) omit a passage which in Montpellier MS. and the rest is placed between l. 20294 and ll. 20295, 6 :

Atant comença à plorer  
Et en plorant à raconter.



This long passage bears in itself the evidence of its having been interpolated.

In the Gawain episode quoted above it will be remembered that the hero is made to ask about lance, sword and bier. He is satisfied as to the first, but falls asleep before the history of the sword is completed, and when he awakes, the country-folk reproach him for not having asked also about the Grail. But in the Montpellier MS., and its group, some one who failed to see the bearing of Gawain's omission upon the conduct of the story, has forestalled the reproaches of the country people by supplying the whole previous history of the Grail. The passage interpolated tells how Our Lord loved the Grail, and honoured it with His Blood on the day of His Crucifixion. Joseph had the Grail made, and put it under Our Lord's Feet to catch the flowing blood. He begged Christ's Body from Pilate, wrapped it up and laid it in a tomb. Joseph treasured the Grail; he laid it in a rich chest, and burned two tapers before it daily, and prayed before it for love of the Sacred Blood. On this account the Jews imprisoned him in a high tower. He prayed the Lord to deliver him from the tower, and the Grail from the hands of the Jews. He was delivered without difficulty, but the Jews hearing of it sent him into exile with all his friends, and his sister and that Nicodemus who had an "image" of Christ. They set sail in search of the land which God had promised to Joseph, the White Isle, a part of England. And in the third year of their sojourn, those of the land rose up and warred against them. When Joseph had need of food, he prayed God to send him the Grail, wherein he had received the Sacred Blood. And they all sat down to dine, and the Grail went about and fed them all with bread and wine, in great plenty. And Joseph kept peace with his foes until his death, and at his end he prayed God that the Grail might remain with his seed. Thus it was in truth, that after his death no one had sight of it, whatever his descent, if he were not of this high lineage; the Rich Fisher was of that kin, and so was Greloguevaus, of whom came Perceval.

Later on in Wauchier's narrative, when the story has returned to Perceval, there is an account of the appearance of the Grail to that hero.

During his journeying in the forest, after he left the Castle of Maidens, he meets a damsel leading a white mule, and joins himself to her, although she entreats him not to do so. He presently sees a

great light in the forest, and turning to ask her what it means he finds her gone, and a violent storm overtakes him. Next day he encounters her again, she having felt no storm. She tells him the light came from the Grail (Gréaus), fair and precious, in which the glorious blood of the King of kings was received as He hung on the Cross; the Devil may not lead astray any man on the day he sees it, and therefore the king has it carried about.

Apart from the interpolation already dealt with, this passage is our first introduction to a new conception of the Grail. Up to now we have had no hint of its connection with Our Lord's Passion beyond the explanation, twice repeated, of the Bleeding Spear as being that wherewith Longinus pierced the side of Christ.

Chrestien mentions the bright light which shone from the Grail, without giving it any particular significance.

MS. Berne 113 supplies an independent conclusion to Wauchier's story. His narrative, as the majority of the MSS. give it, tells of Perceval's arrival at the Fisher King's Castle, and how he there renews his inquiries about Graal and Lance. But the King puts him off with an explanation of a comparatively unimportant incident, the apparition of the child in the tree, and with the imposition of a test. Here Wauchier's portion in all probability ends with the words,

E Perceval se reconforte,

and the knight's questions never meet with any reply.

But as at another crisis of the story, some one is at hand to add a ready and plausible explanation of the difficulties.

From the conclusion of the MS. Berne 113 we learn that the lance was that which pierced the side of Christ. Perceval gives his father's name, Alains li Gros, and the Fisher King replies that Alains li Gros was his son by Enigeus, sister to Joseph, to whom the body of Christ when taken down from the Cross was committed by Pilate as a reward for his services. Nicodemus took it down and gave it to Joseph, who prepared a vessel to hold the Blood from the Sacred Wounds. Jesus had made the Sacrament in this vessel the Thursday before.

Already then, with the first continuator of the Conte del Graal, we have the Grail conception enlarged by the introduction of a new element, the element of Christian Mysticism; and side by side with the fairyland figures of the Fisher King and the knights of Arthur's court, we find the quasi-Scriptural or Christian Legendary figures of

Joseph of Arimathea, and his sister, and Nicodemus ingeniously drawn into a semblance of relationship. But it is noteworthy that this new element slips in in casual references, or by way of interpolation not too well contrived, and is in no sense a vital part of the story.

The Interpolation and the Berne conclusion, though found in different manuscripts, and inserted at different points in Wauchier's narrative, have in reality the same object in view. That object is to call attention emphatically to the connection between the story of the Graal and the story of Joseph of Arimathea, a connection which Wauchier had passed over with a brief reference, and without any mention of Joseph's name. The fact that the Interpolation interrupts the logical flow of the narrative, and that the Berne conclusion has not the sanction of Wauchier himself, does not in the least deter the unknown commentators from making their additions.

For some reason, at which we can only guess, Wauchier's reticence struck them as unaccountable, and whether for fear the popularity of his poem should suffer, or whether for the sake of edification, they hastened to say themselves what Wauchier ought to have said.

Wauchier's references to the sacred uses of Grail and Lance, apart from the Elucidation, put quite out of the question any suggestion that with the commentators themselves originated a new and fortuitous connection between the Grail and the Passion of Our Lord. Nor is it more likely that out of Wauchier's description of the Grail they evolved the Joseph episodes. Wauchier's reference is sufficient for all artistic purposes; a mention of Joseph and his after-history was quite uncalled for. The commentators made their additions clumsily and unskillfully, and quite independently of one another. The connection between the two stories was one they were evidently both familiar with in all its details. They were in all probability drawing from memory upon material they had gathered elsewhere, for in comparison with the ample narrative of the rest of the poem, their additions are little more than summaries of leading facts. We may go a step further and say that the character of the passages suggests that the Joseph tradition came to the knowledge of the commentators in a literary form; there is from the first an absence of spontaneity about the Joseph episodes, as compared with the rest of the cycle, which



suggests for them a literary rather than a popular origin. This characteristic becomes more and more marked as time goes on; the Joseph portions are untouched throughout by that wild and wayward imagination, the elfin fancy, which the art of the Romancers can prune but cannot uproot. In their last stages they fall away into the lowest depths of banality and grotesqueness.

But granted the existence of a literary forbear, is it possible to identify it wholly or partially with any existing member of the Grail cycle?

In the case of the Interpolation the question must practically be answered in the negative. The passage is most nearly related to the Grand St. Graal and to portions of the *Queste del San Graal*. The former is a composite narrative belonging as a whole to a later period than Wauchier's *Conte del Graal*. The boldness and naïveté of the interpolator's story makes it more than probable that he drew his material from some lost and forgotten Early History, which was later elaborated into the existing Grand St. Graal, and from which the *Queste* was a borrower. The question will be dealt with more fully later on.

Critics have named both Robert de Borron and the prose romance *Perceval* of the Didot MS. as the source of the Berne conclusion. In either case there are certain difficulties of detail to be overcome. De Borron makes Brons the father of Alain, but gives no name to the "son of his son." The Didot-*Perceval* agrees with the Berne conclusion in identifying *Perceval* with the son of Alain. But, on the other hand, the statement that the Graal vessel was the same in which Our Lord made the Sacrament on Maundy Thursday tallies rather with De Borron than with the Didot-*Perceval*. But in neither case are the discrepancies so great that we are of necessity thrown back upon a hypothetical Early History as the source of the commentator's information.

To return for the moment to the question with which our survey began. Up to the present, apart from conjectures based upon literary criteria, we can draw no definite conclusions from the material supplied by Wauchier and his commentators towards the solution of the main problem, namely, who first combined the ancient tales of mystery with the legends of the Christian Church. Chrestien is silent. The *Elucidation* remains to perplex and tantalize us with the title of its seventh sub-division, the tale of Longinus and the Spear, but we have no means of judging if in its

pages Joseph of Arimathea had already been drawn into the charmed circle of Arthur's court.

As the result of our survey, on one point alone can we feel any degree of certainty: as for the Perceval portion so for the Joseph portion of the Grail cycle, a prototype must have existed which survives for us only in the adaptations of later writers.

#### § 4. ROBERT DE BORRON AND THE PROSE ROMANCES.

Hitherto we have had to deal but with fragmentary references and interpolations. The first writer to make serious use of Christian Legend in connection with the Grail, was Robert de Borron, author of a metrical poem, 'Joseph of Arimathea'; and with him a new aspect of the problem presents itself.

De Borron makes two important contributions to our material in (1) the introduction of an entirely new group of persons, headed by one Brons, who is to be keeper of the Grail after Joseph's death, and whose son, Alain, is to lead the host of Joseph's companions westward to the vale of Avalon; and (2) springing out of this, in the introduction of the idea of a mission of conversion. Alain and his brethren, at the command of Joseph, go westward and preach the name of Christ.

The names of Brons, Alain, Petrus and the rest have been taken as evidence that their owners were of Celtic origin, but in their existing shape, they primarily suggest that de Borron drew his material from a Latin source. To the question of an ultimate Celtic original it will be necessary to return again. For the moment we must recognize that de Borron can safely be accredited only with the sacramental and moral expositions of which his poem contains so large a share. Probably no inventions of fact or incident are his due, but rather a share in obliterating, although with the best intentions, the earlier outlines of the tale. De Borron's debt to the past is, in fact, no less than that of the writers with whom we have already dealt, and he brings us little nearer to the solution of the problem.

The two prose works next to be considered, the 'Queste del San Graal,' attributed in the MSS. to Walter Mapes, and the so-called 'Grand St. Graal' (attributed in the same way, but with less likelihood, to de Borron), stand in as close relationship to one another as does the last-named to the Joseph poem. The *Queste* belongs to the last twenty-five years of the twelfth century. The 'Chronicle of Helinandus' contains a reference to the Grand St. Graal

(in some earlier form than that in which we have it), which can relate to no other member of the cycle. The Chronicle closes with the capture of Constantinople by the French in 1204, but, as Dr. Sebastian Evans has pointed out,<sup>1</sup> it is improbable that any part of it was written before Helinandus became a monk at Froidmont about the year 1209, or that the latest portion was composed after 1227. The Grand St. Graal must therefore have appeared before 1227, and the character of the reference to it in the Chronicle makes it clear that by that date its fame was already well established, and brings it in all probability within twenty or thirty years of the date of the *Queste*.

The older portions of the Grand St. Graal are prior to anything in the *Queste*, and probably the nearest representative remaining to us of that prototype of the Joseph portion of the legend from which the post-Chrestien sections of the *Conte del Graal* drew their information. But the later portions of the Grand St. Graal appear to have been influenced by the *Queste*; at any rate they contain a confused reminiscence of portions of the *Queste* characteristically weak and incoherent.

The main incidents which the two works have in common are: The history of King Evelach's wars with Tholome, and of his Magic Shield (in which the *Queste* finds a symbolical meaning).

The stories of the three tables and the Seat Perilous, and the incident of the old woman with her loaves.

The story of Crudel and his treatment of Josephes, Mordrains and Seraphe.

The lineage and vision of Celidoine.

The history of Solomon's Ship, the Turning Isle, and the three Spindles. The history of Josephes, son of Joseph, first Bishop of Christendom, and his celebration of the Mass (the *Queste* includes this in Galahad's Vision).

In the *Queste* these passages are all introduced by some such formula as "it is told as follows," and are in no case essential parts of the narrative. Generally speaking, the borrowing lay with Walter Mapes rather than with the author of the Grand St. Graal. But the question is a very complicated one. For the Grand St. Graal is only explicable if we suppose it to have been written and re-written at different times, and each time with growing carelessness and lack of

<sup>1</sup> 'High History of the Holy Grail.' Translator's Epilogue, p. 293 *et seq.*

skill, and readiness to include the most irrelevant episodes. And in the final recast the usual order seems to have been reversed, and the *Queste* has reacted upon the older tale in points of detail. Both histories are strikingly inferior to the *Conte del Graal* in imaginative and artistic power. It is unnecessary to suppose that the author of the *Queste* had any knowledge of de Borron's poem. On the particular subjects with which they both deal, the *Queste* contains nothing which its author cannot have learnt from the *Grand St. Graal*. In Mr. Nutt's opinion, had the Joseph poem fallen into the hands of Walter Mapes, it must have proved so congenial to his taste for mystical interpretation, that its influence could not fail to have shown itself.

The relation between the *Grand St. Graal* and de Borron's work is of much greater significance. The *Grand St. Graal* follows de Borron in the main in its account of Christ's visit to Joseph in the prison, of Vespasian, and the cloth of Veronica; and in its pages we meet once more with the important group of characters headed by Brons, the Grail-keeper.

The contributions of the remaining writers of the Cycle are of less importance to us, because the matter they introduce shows no trace of having been borrowed elsewhere than in the writings already discussed. Manessier, the third continuator of the *Conte del Graal*, summarizes the history of the Lance, of Joseph's acquisition of the Graal, and of his relations to Evelac, to all appearance from the account in the *Grand St. Graal*. Gerbert's portion of the *Conte del Graal* is in all probability not a continuation of Manessier's, but an independent ending, following on Wauchier's. He brings Perceval, in the course of his search for Grail and Lance, to an abbey, where he learns the story of 'Joseph of Barimaschie.' His account of Joseph's arrival in Britain shows some slight variations, which from their character are probably the author's own invention. Joseph has two fair ladies as companions, one of whom, Philosophine, has a plate, the other an ever-bleeding lance. The Crudel episode is given, and Mordrains is punished for drawing near to the Grail.

The attempt already apparent in Gerbert to give greater coherence to the story, culminates in the Perceval of the Didot MS., which on this account must be placed after the rest in point of chronology. Here Brons, the Rich Fisher, again comes into prominence as the Grail-keeper; Joseph is only referred to as his ancestor, the first

Grail-keeper, and maker of the second famous table. In this way, the difficulty of the two Grail-keepers is ingeniously solved.

The later Prose Romance of *Perceval li Gallois*, or *Perlesvax*, is of interest for our present purpose chiefly because it shows the direction in which the Christian Legendary element tended to develop. There we have not only the shield of Joseph of Arimathea hung in Arthur's hall at Carduel, but a shield which had belonged to Judas Maccabeus; not only the lance of Longinus, but also the sword with which St. John Baptist was beheaded, and which at noonday dripped blood. And Lancelot sees at the Castle of the Golden Cirelet a jewelled crown, in which is enclosed the Crown of Thorns. For the rest the Romancer repeats the Early History of the Grail and of Joseph's imprisonment. Joseph is possessor of Grail and Lance. He is also author of the Grail History which he wrote down at the command of an angel, but this distinction he shares with the historian Josephus, with whom the Romancer identifies him. The mother of Perceval is Iglais, sister to Joseph, and "the good knight" is descended from Nicodemus through his father, Julians (for Alain?) li Gros.

#### § 5. THE SOURCES OF THE GRAND ST. GRAAL.

We find ourselves at the close of our survey no better able than before to answer definitely the question to whom the appearance of Joseph of Arimathea in the Grail Cycle is to be attributed. We are simply thrown back upon the hypothesis of lost prototypes. But to a further question, why, and a still further one where, this introduction came about, some more satisfactory reply may perhaps be found.

A good deal of material included in the Joseph Episodes can definitely be assigned to well-known sources, and especially the Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus. What cannot be learnt from Christian Legendary History are the leading facts as far as the Grail story is concerned. As they stand, these facts have become modified, distorted, transformed, by contact with the older Celtic tales. But they still possess some features in which it is possible to trace the line of thought which led some long-ago story-teller to place the two, side by side, upon his page.

The most important of these facts are (1) Joseph's possession of the Grail—his position as Grail-keeper bound to hand on the sacred vessel to his seed,—and (2) his missionary journey to Britain. Both these positions Joseph shares, in the fullest versions of his story, with another personage, one Brons.



The Joseph poem of de Borron, as it remains to us, is clearly abridged and arranged, and in its present condition, all the latter parts, which relate the journeys to Britain, are very fragmentary and incoherent. De Borron does not in fact make it clear that Joseph himself ever went to Britain. That is left to Brons and his son Alain, and on the latter the charge of preaching the gospel is most definitely laid.

In the Grand St. Graal the missionary idea is more fully developed, and at the outset Joseph in prison receives the commission of Christ. In de Borron, the Grail vessel is committed to Brons and Alain, and the former is called the Rich Fisher, a name which connects him with the undoubtedly Celtic portions of the Cycle.

These facts make it clear that in Brons and the episodes especially connected with him, we have material of great importance for the development of the Cycle.

As has been said, the personal names in de Borron's poem bear traces of the Latin version through which they passed into his hands. Brons is one of these names, and its close relationship to the "Bran" of Celtic tradition is unmistakable.

Bran played a more conspicuous part in the early literature of Wales than in early Irish Literature. The Mythology of Ancient Wales makes Bran to have been son of Llyr, the god of the sea and the world of waters, often also associated with darkness. Bran was closely connected with the under-world, and is probably also to be identified with Urien, Lord of Rheged, a district located in the far north. Ireland, Scotland, and the whole region of the north, lands of fable and mystery to the inhabitants of Western Britain, represent mythically in the geography of Arthurian Legend, the untrodden world of Hades, the Otherworld of the dead. In Welsh poetry, Urien is addressed as Lord and Blessed Prince of the Evening, and in one of the poems ascribed to Taliessin appears as Lord of the Dead and Principal Pilgrim to a distant City. A poem in the Red Book of Hergest gives to Urien a black crow, or raven, on his breast, as a fitting attribute, and "Bran" is Welsh for this emblem. In the Grail Cycle, Bron is first brought on the scenes by de Borron as brother-in-law of Joseph of Arimathea, and husband of his sister Enigeus, whose name recalls that of Ygène, the Romancers' version of Yguerne, wife of Uther Ben-Dragon, and mother of Arthur.

Brons and his wife journey with a band of followers to a far

country. After a time of prosperity the work of Joseph's followers turns to ill. They complain to Brons that they are suffering hunger, and Brons reports this to Joseph. Joseph kneels before the holy vessel for inspiration, and a voice from heaven bids him prepare a table in the name of the table of the Last Supper. Brons (Hebron) is then to go into the water and catch a fish. The first he catches is to be put on the table opposite the Grail, which is to be covered with a towel. Joseph is to sit where Christ sat at the Sacrament of the Last Supper, and the people are to be summoned to sit down to the Grace of our Lord. Some sit down, and are filled with sweetness and the desire of their hearts; some do not, and they feel nothing. Petrus, one of the sinners, tells them this is because of their defilement. The sinners depart, but Joseph bids them come back day by day, and thus is the vessel proved. It detects sinners from saints, as it has no love for any sinner. It is called Grail; none see it but those to whom it is agreeable, and their delight in it is like that of a fish escaping out of a man's hand into the water. In the Grand St. Graal the story is told at greater length, and with some difference of detail; for example, Alain appears as the fisherman in place of his father, Brons; Josephes, son of Joseph, and his company go to Britain, and he converts many to Christianity by the power of his preaching. They come one day to a waste land (Terre Gaste) where food is scarce, and all the company are not worthy to be fed by the holy vessel. In the midst of the valley they find a great pool, and at the head of the pool a vessel with a fishing-net in it. The sinners being very hungry come to Josephes, and ask his counsel. Josephes calls for Aleyn le Gros, the twelfth son of Brons and minister of the Graal, and bids him cast his net into the water, and catch fish for the company. Aleyn (Alain) does his bidding, and when the net is drawn to land, only one large fish is found in it. The fish is cooked and cut up into three parts, one of which is put at each end of the table, and one in the midst. With many tears Alain prays before the vessel, and a miracle is wrought, so that it more than suffices for the whole company. Alain ever after bears the name of the Rich Fisher, and the pond is called Alain's pond.

The incidents in Celtic tales which may be compared with these are but scanty and leave much room for conjecture. In the first place, as to the connection of Brons or Bran with the Grail vessel, opposite which, perhaps originally into which, he was to put

his fish when caught. There is no mention in the tale of Bran's Head, in the Mabinogi of Branwen, of any vessel comparable to the Grail, though the companions of the Head, like those privileged to be fed by the Grail, never lacked the best of food and drinks. Bran was, however, the possessor of a cauldron, brought to him by Llassar Llaesgyvnewid and his wife from the Lake of the Cauldron in Ireland, the properties of which are thus described: "if one of thy men be slain to-day, and be cast therein to-morrow, he will be as well as ever he was at the best, except that he will not regain his speech."

As regards the episode of the fishing, the evidence is again for the most part conjectural. We have no information in Welsh Literature about the descendants of Bran. But in the summary of mythic history already given, it was suggested that he might be identified with Urien, Lord of Rheged, god of the Underworld. In that group of the "dark divinities" of Welsh Mythology, which includes Urien, Bran the Blessed, and Uther Ben-Dragon, personages with many attributes in common, and whose names appear to a certain extent to be interchangeable, two are found who possess sons of the name of Elphin, one of these being Urien, the other a certain Gwyddno Garanhir.

A tale told in the prose portion of the Story of Taliessin, of Elphin, son of Gwyddno, to which Professor Rhys has called attention, though of more doubtful antiquity than the verse portions, has some bearing on the episodes at present under discussion.

Gwyddno Garanhir (Heron-Fisher) has a weir on the strand between Dyvi and Aberystwyth, near to his own castle, and the value of a hundred pounds is taken in it every May Eve. One year, he grants the drawing of it to his only son Elphin, to give him something wherewith to begin the world. But when Elphin goes to try his luck, there is nothing in the weir, but a leathern bag on the pole of the weir. And in the leathern bag was the boy-bard Taliessin. To console Elphin for his disappointment he makes him a promise:

In the day of trouble I will be  
of more service to thee  
than many hundred salmon.

In this tale both Gwyddno and Elphin are represented as fishermen, just as Brons and Alain in the Grand St. Graal and the Joseph poem, when taken together. Alain and Elphin have two other



features in common. Each is successful in a solitary capture, and Alain alone of all his kindred never wore a crown, while Elphin is described as a luckless youth.

The inferences that may be fairly drawn from the foregoing are indeed but slight. The name of Brons suggests the identification of this hero with the Bran of Welsh and Irish tales, who is Lord of the Otherworld. In support of this, we find Brons brought into connection with a vessel possessing magic powers. Such a vessel is one of the stereotyped possessions of the Celtic Dis in his various shapes. Again Brons and his son are fishermen, and the single fish which they catch has magic properties. Other fragments of Welsh story show us the god of the Otherworld and his son, under other names, following in the same pursuit with the same small success. Inferences slight indeed, yet not without their value. A fish with magic properties is a prominent feature in many Irish Mythological tales. With that fish, "the Salmon of Wisdom," Mr. Nutt suggests the comparison of Brons' capture; he himself is "that being who passes his life in vain endeavour to catch the wonderful fish, and who in the moment of success is robbed of the fruit of all his long toil and watchings."<sup>1</sup>

This comparison is the more suggestive when it is remembered that the idea underlying the visit of Perceval to the Magic Castle, the dwelling of Brons, the Fisher King, is allied to the same world-wide myth: the myth of a mortal's visit to the other world, in quest of riches, power or knowledge, to be bestowed as a boon on his race. That is to say, the Brons Fishing episode falls into line with the rest of the Cycle as possessing the same underlying conception, as belonging to the same set of tales, and sharing with them certain features which rendered it all the more likely to be caught up into the same web of romance. The Romanceurs themselves, no less than those from whom they borrowed facts and incidents, were completely unaware of this underlying mythical conception; they put their own interpretation upon the tales, and at a later stage, they disguised them almost past recognition in the garb of Christian symbolism. But enough remains to leave little doubt that Brons and Alain derive from a Celtic stock.

But if this be the case, how is it that they are found in the incongruous rôle of Evangelists to Britain? In de Borron's poem the mission of conversion belongs even more to them than to Joseph of

<sup>1</sup> Nutt, p. 209.

Arimathea, and there is nothing in the Christian Legendary History upon which the poet drew so largely, to suggest that any such commission was given to Joseph. Is that mission entirely de Borron's invention, or was it suggested to him or to his predecessor by anything in the story of Brons as it came to his knowledge? Some further search into the stories which on Irish soil centred about Bran strengthens this last supposition.

#### § 6. THE BRANDAN LEGEND AND THE GRAND ST. GRAAL.

The part played in Irish Literature by Bran, brother to Manannân mac Lir, the great wizard (the Welsh Manawÿddan), is a very inconspicuous one.

There exists, however, as one of the oldest remains of Irish Story-telling, a composition known as the Voyage of Bran,<sup>1</sup> the son of Febal, dealing with another hero of the same name. The versified portions of the tale are considered by scholars to date back to the eighth, or even the seventh century. Manannân plays a part in this tale, though his relationship to the hero is not defined. This tale is generally recognized as a version of the widespread myth of a mortal's visit to Elysium.

In course of time it found its mediæval representative in the far more famous 'Navigatio Sancti Brendani,' which has been called one of the contributory causes to the discovery of the New World.

A manuscript of the 'Navigatio' is said to exist in the Vatican Library, which dates back to the early eleventh century. The Irish Life of St. Brandan, known as the Betha Brenainn, although existing only in a manuscript dating from the latter half of the fifteenth century, represents materials of far greater antiquity. It possesses many of the features of an older mythological tale, and one gathers that when it was written down the Holy Brandan had but recently taken a place in the roll of the saints. It represents its hero, though a saint of the Christian Church, as being a son of Finn Lug (the god of Light) and own brother to Brig, a Celtic goddess not yet identified with the Holy Bridget; the miraculous circumstances of Brandan's birth and baptism, even the tale of his upbringing by a wild cow (because his foster-father, Bishop Ere, had not a milch cow, for he received but moderate alms from the faithful), all savour of his mythic origin.

<sup>1</sup> The Voyage of Bran, Grimm Library, 4, 6, 1895-97, ed. Alfred Nutt.

A point of interest in his subsequent history is the blessing bestowed by Brandan on the fifty fishless rivers of Ireland, so that they abounded in fish. He is specially connected with the river Theyse, which is fed by the Fountain or well of St. Brandan, in Ardfaert, a very favourite place of pilgrimage.<sup>1</sup> It is tempting to suppose that a curious episode in the same Irish life may be a far-away echo of some such tale as that which survives in Welsh Literature about the Head of Bran. One day Brandan is on a journey; a young man joins his company, and presently they meet seven fighting men, enemies of his. He fears they will murder him, but Brandan bids him lie down in the shadow of a pillow stone, hard by, and prays God to save the young man in the appearance of the pillow stone. His enemies come to the stone, cut off the head in the shape of his, wound the pillow stone in the side, and carry the supposed head with them. And still the stone remains.

The account which the Irish Life gives of the famous voyage of St. Brandan, in search of the Land of Promise of the Saints, closely resembles that of the Latin ‘*Navigatio*.’ The motive for the voyage is, however, variously represented. It comes about either from Brandan’s desire to leave all things and seek a quiet retreat where he may give himself up to the service of God, or from his zeal for souls in remote islands.

A version of the ‘*Navigatio*’ contained in the ‘*Codex Salmanticensis*,’ in the Burgundian Library at Brussels, enlarges upon this latter idea, and gives a long account of St. Brandan’s various missionary journeys, after his remoter wanderings were ended, including visits to Scotland and the Orkneys, to Wales, and to St. Gildas in Brittany. It is curious that many traces of his name exist on the mainland of Scotland as well as in the islands, while he is referred to in mediæval Calendars as the Apostle of Britain, the Orkneys, and the Scottish Isles.

We thus find originating on Irish soil a tale about one Bran, visitor to the Otherworld, and others about a missionary saint and traveller who appears to be of mythic descent. To identify either of these with Bran, son of Lir, would require the equation of the Lord of the Otherworld with the visitor to the same region, a point of some difficulty. Turning to the early literature of Wales, the epithet already quoted as applied to Urien, lord of Rheged, Bran’s prototype,

<sup>1</sup> “In the *Conte del Graal*, Perceval’s mother goes on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Brandan in Scotland.” (Nutt, *App. B.* p. 265.)

"Principal Pilgrim to a distant City," may be recalled. Going a step further it may now be asked if any parallelism can be found between Bendigeid Bran of the *Mabinogi*, or Brons of the *Grand St. Graal*, and St. Brandan, who possesses on Irish soil a well-defined "Conversion Legend."

In the first place, what is the meaning of the epithet "Bendigeid," Blessed, constantly applied to Bran in Welsh Literature? A late fourteenth century *Triad* gives a plausible explanation. Bran is said to be "one of the three blissful rulers of the Island of Britain, who first brought the Faith of Christ to the nation of the Cymry from Rome, where he was seven years a hostage for his son Caradawc." This passage certainly shows confusion on one historic point. The author has confounded Caratacus, son of Brennus, with the mythic Caradawc, while at the same time he has made an interchange of parents, so that Bran the "blissful ruler" becomes father to the historic Caratacus. His statements about Bran's missionary journey to Britain may be equally unreliable, and the passage is at best but a very late piece of evidence.

A far more acceptable explanation of the epithet on general grounds is Professor Rhys' suggestion that the Lord of the Other-world was held to be the special protector of the Bards, and therefore an object of blessing to them.

But, at the same time, the evidence of the *Triad* cannot be summarily dismissed. It stands alone in Welsh Grail Literature in connecting the idea of conversion with Brons, or Bran, as in *de Borron*, rather than with Joseph, and with a Bran not yet numbered with the saints, but possessing some of the attributes of the older deity, that is to say, the father of Caradawc. Late in date as it undoubtedly is, the argument that it originated entirely with the Romances is not unanswerable. For no Welsh translation of the French Romances which ascribe the conversion to Brons and his group of companions is known, while Welsh versions of the Romances which make Joseph the Apostle of Britain still exist. It is therefore at least as likely that the *Triad* preserves the echoes of an older Welsh tradition as that it quotes from *de Borron* or the *Grand St. Graal*.

And if this be so, it is the one fragment of evidence we possess for the existence, in Welsh Tales of Bran, of the same tendency which on Irish soil reached its full development in the evolution of Saint Brandan.

Further than this we cannot go, for in Welsh Literature the

fortunes of Bran become hopelessly involved with those of Joseph of Arimathea.

To return to de Borron, the story which lies behind his poem represents an intermediate stage of growth between the mythic Bran and the saintly Brandan, if for the moment we allow the identification of the lord of Hades and the traveller to the regions of the Dead. In support of this hypothesis there exist many traces of kinship between the tales of Brandan and of Brons.

Two of the objects of St. Brandan's journeyings have already been given. A third is found in the prologue to a form of the legend of which Schröder printed a German version at Erlangen in 1871, and the composition of which he considers may be attributed to the last quarter of the twelfth century. Other versions of the same character enjoyed wide popularity. Brandan is angry and incredulous at the marvels of which he reads in rare books (or especially in a book brought to him by an angel from heaven), and he burns the book. As a punishment he is bidden by the voice of God, to journey on the ocean till he finds whether the marvels are real or a lie (or till he has discovered the book he has burnt), which by God's grace he is at length able to do. Now the likeness between this prologue and that which prefaces the Grand St. Graal is very remarkable. There can be little doubt, from its totally different style to the rest of the work, that the latter prologue was taken over by the author of the Grand St. Graal, in its existing form, from an older composition. The reference to it in the *Chronicle of Helinandus*, which speaks of a hermit to whom a vision of the centurion, Joseph of Arimathea, was shown by an angel, establishes the fact that already before the year 1227 the prologue had been used to preface the supplanter of the tale it was originally written to introduce. Of that older tale no trace remains to us, unless, as is by no means improbable, some of its episodes became absorbed, like so much else, into the body of the Grand St. Graal.

Turning to the text of the Prologue of the Grand St. Graal, some minor points present themselves for comment. For "Val Escone," Lovelich's still more corrupt "Walescog," we should probably read "Val Escos" (the King of Escos, for King of Scotland, occurs later in the poem), and this with the mention of Norway, leads our thoughts to the abode of the Dead as the scene of our monk's journeyings. Other indications of the truth of this supposition are found in the mention of the Great Beast, a frequent



figure in Otherworld stories, whether it appears as the Hound of Hell, or as the quarry of the infernal pack of the Head of Hades.

The contests in this region are too numerous for one to be surprised at learning next of the Valley of the Dead, where near the Fountain of Weeping took place a great slaughter and the battle of the two best knights in the world. Finally, the wondrous Fountain "whose sand is blood-red and fire-hot, and whose water is ice-cold, and becomes green and bitter three times a day," calls to mind the fountain of Brandan's journeyings, which had two streams, one running clear, one troubled; or that other which induced a sleep of one, two or three days, according to the number of goblets of its water partaken of; or the more orthodox stream of Maelduin's wanderings, which yielded whey or water on Wednesday or Friday, but on feasts of Martyrs and Sundays good milk, and on feasts of the Apostles, of Mary, and of St. John the Baptist, ale and wine.

We have mentioned the difficulty of grouping together the various stories which in Welsh and Irish Literature centre round the name of Bran, because such a classification requires the identification of the Lord of the Otherworld with the Visitor to the Otherworld. Now that mortal visitor is generally in search of treasures of knowledge, of which the Over-lord is the special guardian and protector, as Bran was of the Bards who called him Blessed. In these Prologues we seem to have an echo of the old idea. It is the thirst for knowledge that drives Brandan forth on journeyings that may not cease till he finds the Book of Knowledge he has himself forfeited. In the case of the monk of the Grand St. Graal Prologue, the book he seeks is called the Book of the Graal, that is of the vessel of Knowledge. That is to say, in these Prologues we find the Traveller, Brandan, is also the Seeker after treasures particularly associated with the Lord of Hades.

Episodes are not wanting in the body of the Grand St. Graal which link it yet more closely with stories of the Brandan type. The episode of the Seat Perilous is found both in the Grand St. Graal and in de Borron. In the former work, the author has been so much struck by it that he repeats it a second time, with unintelligent variations of his own, about a different person. The hero of this episode in de Borron is one Moys, who first appears in connection with an incident already described, the separation of sinners from saints by means of the Grail. In the solitary MS.

which preserves de Borron's poem, a gap exists which robs us of much of Moys' history, but it can be filled in from the prose versions.

Moys is a hypocrite, and presumptuously puts himself forward, supported by his companion sinners, to sit in the empty seat, left by Brons at the Grail Table to signify the seat of Judas at the Last Supper. Josephes warns him in vain, and at once seven fiery hands from Heaven seize and carry him off to a place far away, burning like a dry bush. Some day his companions shall know where he is.

In the Joseph poem we hear no more of Moys; and the author's promise at the conclusion of that poem to tell what had become of the long lost sinner, seems never to have been fulfilled. It is left to the Grand St. Graal to relate how, when Josephes and his companions come to a great house in the forest of Nantes, they see in the hall a great fire burning, from which a voice calls to them. It is the voice of Moys, asking Josephes to pray that his pain may be relieved through the mercy of God. Josephes prays, and a great rain comes down into the fire and quenches half of it. Moys tells them that his sufferings are greatly eased thereby, but the fire shall last till the coming of Galahad, who shall end the adventures of the Grail, and finally release him from his pain.

The Grand St. Graal also supplies the earlier history of Moys, who is the son of one Symeu. Both father and son are sinners, and when the rest of the Grail company find room to cross to Britain on the back of Josephes' shirt, they sink in the water, and have to be pulled ashore by those left behind.

The remarkable story of the shirt may perhaps be traceable, and is certainly comparable, to an incident in the Mabinogi of Branwen, where Bran, fleeing from his enemies, waded through two rivers with the musicians of his court on his back, the Romancer, in his desire to go at least one step further towards the miraculous, having stumbled upon the ridiculous. If this is the case, and the rest of Moys' career is, as we hope to show, comparable to incidents which are part of all the so-called "Imrama" stories, including the voyages of Bran and Brandan, it is somewhat significant that we should have in the Grand St. Graal, welded into one tale, episodes from the lives of the Lord of the Otherworld and the Visitor to the same region.

To turn again to the Voyage of Bran, son of Febal: he has amongst his companions one Nechtan, son of Collbran, who, when they reach a certain island called the Island of Women, becomes

homesick for his native Ireland. All the wanderers accompany him home, but are warned against setting foot on land. Nechtan leaps from the coracle; and as soon as he touches the soil of Ireland, he becomes a heap of ashes.

In the Imrama group of stories which are traceable to the same root idea, the incident of the unruly or illfated companion of the voyage is one which in some form or another continually occurs. In the *Voyage of Maelduin* (which stands in close relationship to the 'Navigatio,' and is now generally regarded as its source), the three foster-brothers of the hero, in spite of the warning of a wizard, cast themselves into the sea and swim after the vessel. On one of the islands visited, the third foster-brother proposes to carry off a necklace, which he finds in a marble palace, and seizes it; but a small cat, which has been engaged in jumping from one to another of the stone pillars, at sight of the theft, leaps through the guilty man, and he becomes ashes. In the 'Navigatio' itself the opportunities for moralizing which the episode affords are fully realized. Three monks follow the Holy Brandan, and implore his leave to accompany him, though he prophesies an evil end for two of their number. They disembark at an island where is a marble palace, surrounded by a wall of crystal. One of the monks is tempted to theft by the precious objects hanging round the walls, and carries off a silver bridle. Sudden death overtakes him, though he is promised ultimate forgiveness.

In the *Voyage of the Hui Corra*, another of the Imrama group, it is a jester who has joined the party at last, who dies during the voyage, when a little bird sits on the gunwale of the boat and says, "I am your jester, . . . be not mournful . . . for now I shall go to heaven." In the *Irish Life of Brandan*, the late arrival is a man called "Crosan" (rendered "buffoon" in some translations). The seafarers come to an Island of Sea-cats which threaten them with destruction, and Crosan consents to sacrifice himself, leaps ashore, and dies. All these episodes have in common two leading features—(1) the presence in the party of voyagers of one or more tardy or unruly members, (2) an act of theft or presumption followed by sudden destruction.

In the *Grand St. Graal*, blurred and faint as are the outlines, these features are still distinguishable in the account of Moys and Symeu, unable owing to mortal sin to cross the sea with the rest, and of the presumption of Moys at the Grail feast bringing about



his fiery end. The element of endless feasting will be found in all the tales quoted. "A theft taboo," says Mr. Nutt, "is an essential feature in all Underworld visits; similarly, most contain some incident to indicate the impossibility of return." The Seat Perilous may not improbably represent some form of taboo.<sup>1</sup>

Brons in the Grand St. Graal was bidden to draw back from the Seat Perilous because it signified the seat quitted by the traitor Judas, at the Last Supper. In the Brandan Legend, Judas on his Iceberg is partially relieved from burning tortures by the intercession of the Saint, just as the prayers of Josephes, who has elsewhere been found standing in the room of Brons, suffice to quench the flames to which Moys is doomed till Judgment Day.<sup>2</sup>

But the points of contact between the Grand St. Graal and the Brandan Legend are not yet exhausted, and lead us on to a further group of characters, to which as yet no reference has been made. This is the group which centres round Evalach, King of Sarras, and his brother-in-law, Nasciens, personages who appear only in the Grand St. Graal.

Two stories are told of Evalach's birth and origin, of one of which Hucher made great use in building up his argument for Robert de Borron's authorship of the Grand St. Graal; it is, however, to be classed with the episodes of Hippocras and Fowcairs the pirate, as a late and extremely unintelligent addition to the tale, serving no other purpose than to increase its already weary length.

<sup>1</sup> It is a difficult feature to explain satisfactorily. If we accept Professor Rhys' clue to the whole underlying myth, it is tempting to remember that the making of the seat is in the Quest of the Holy Grail attributed to the magic art of Merlin, the sun-god, and then to connect it with the Chair of the Goddess Kerridwen. She was the compounder of a magic cauldron of Wisdom, which is one of the prototypes of the Grail in Welsh story. Kerridwen's Chair was none other than the rainbow. "To build on the rainbow," says Grimm in his 'Teutonic Mythology,' "meant a bootless enterprise, and to sit on the rainbow exposed to great danger, while where it touched the earth there was a golden dish." Apart from Nature myth, both these chairs may have had some such significance, now forgotten, as the Bardic chair of which Taliessin sings—

"The Chair of the fortress of Teganwy

Will I again seek."

<sup>2</sup> Apart from mythic interpretation it may be remembered that the story of the Seat Perilous in some of its features only reproduces contemporary manners. "The High seat in the hall was that of the King or Master; it was left empty in his absence or at his death, and could only be filled again after death by his son, or by his elected successor . . . any one daring in the meantime to occupy it would have looked to be rudely expelled." (Wardle, 'Cymmrodor,' vol. xvi. p. 137.) The same critic quotes from an 11th-century poem of the Pilgrimage of Charlemagne a description of how the Emperor and his knights in the Temple at Jerusalem sat down without hesitation or rebuke in the seats of Christ and his twelve apostles which stood in the Sanctuary.

This passage is in direct contradiction to the earlier account of Evalach's origin; "the lord of that same city was called Evalach the Unknown. And he was called the Unknown, because no man in all his domain knew in what country he was born, nor whence he had come, and he was of so great prowess, that by his knight-hood he had conquered all the land to the entering in of Egypt, . . . and he was of so great age that he could no more bear the weight of arms."

There can be little doubt, both from the coincidence of names, and from the aptness of this description, that Evalach is none other than the Welsh Avallach, ruler of Avalon, Land of Shades. He has many castles, two of which, "Valachin" (*i. e.* Evalach-in) and Tarabel (in the French "Carabel," a corruption of some such name as *Caer Aval*), bore his own name. The approach to Castle Valachin, by a gate over a river an arrow-flight broad, where scarce two chariots could pass, is also characteristic of the entrance to the abode of the dead.

Much of the first part of the *Grand St. Graal* is taken up with an account of Evalach's wars with Tholome, King of Egypt. Geoffrey of Monmouth tells of one Bartholomeus who warred against Spain. Both Spain and Egypt are alike to be located in the region of the departed, together with Orkauz or Orcanz (Orkney), one of the cities of Evalach, while the whole expedition may be regarded as one more version of the Harrying of Hades.

The form of the name "Mordrains" given in Manessier's portion of the *Conte del Graal* is "Noodran," which Professor Rhys suggests is a misreading of Guitnev, a form of Gwyddno, the name of the Fisher in the Taliessin story, the father of Elphin.

The name Mordrains is represented in the *Grand St. Graal* as having been given to Evalach when he was baptized by Joseph. This may either mean that in the older tales, which the romancer was endeavouring to adapt to the record of Joseph's missionary triumphs, Gwyddno and Avallach were different names for the same personage, or that they were different personages, whom he connected together by this simple expedient. From what we have already learnt as to the difficulty of distinguishing the rôles of the Celtic Divinities of the Underworld, an explanation which meets both these suppositions probably comes nearest to the truth.

What is most important for our present purpose is to notice that a very large part of the *Grand St. Graal* is taken up with the travels of

Mordrains, or Avallach, Lord of the Underworld, and those connected with him, from one island to another; that some of those islands have features which strongly recall the islands of Bran or Brandan's wanderings in his thirst for the souls of men.

Chief among these is the Turning Island. In Welsh Literature, one of the names for the abode of the dead is "Caer Sidi," which Professor Rhys renders "the Spinning or revolving Castle." Some such idea as this may not improbably underlie the account of the great fish Jasconias, visited by Brandan and his companions. It has sometimes been supposed that this feature of the story originated in the name and shape of one of the Maghara Islands, Ilaunamil, Island of the Whale, a rocky islet on that part of the west coast of Ireland which tradition makes the home of St. Brandan and the scene of his earliest missionary enterprise.

If the older story brought the Lord of the Under-world to visit his dominions which were protected from intrusion by this strange device of spinning or revolving, and those dominions became located in one of a certain group of islands, the idea of movement being prominent and firmly rooted, might be explained by the fact that one of the islands, like a great whale, really was such an animal, and to this the motion was due. Brandan and his companions left the cauldron which was part of their travelling equipment, upon the whale's back, in perfect security from year to year.

Yet another feature of the islands visited by Mordrains was the presence of innumerable white birds; these are usually to be met with in Otherworld stories, and, like the little bird upon the gunwale, in the Hui Corra, represented the souls of the Departed.

The most picturesque incident of all, one which Malory introduces into his 'Morte d'Arthur,' falls into line with the rest. If, as seems probable, Solomon's ship stands for an island of some earlier tale, Geoffrey of Monmouth makes Solomon to have been King of Brittany, a region which from the 'Irish Life' we know Brandan to have visited. The *Queste* places the ship on the shore of the sea over against Ireland.

Enough has been said to show that the so-called Christian Legendary portion of the Grail Cycle is scarcely less composite than the rest, and when carefully examined, is seen to be derived in the main from the same Celtic stock. The Joseph poem and the Grand St. Graal, apart from their debt to Biblical and Apocryphal sources, are made up of fragments belonging to one particular class of Celtic

stories, those which related the travels of the Lord of Hades, under his different names, to or through his Otherworld kingdom, "Principal Pilgrim to a distant city." As has been said, the rest of the Cycle belongs to much the same mythical root; but it is those tales which dwell more especially upon the aspect of Bran or Evalach as a traveller which in the course of time were gathered up into the fabric of our two romances, and formed the basis of the Conversion Legend. As a new set of ideas became prominent in men's minds, those tales were developed in a particular direction, their special characteristics lent themselves to adaptation of one particular kind.

Bran, son of Febal, became in Ireland Brandan, the missionary saint: the story of Bendigeid Bran had already on Welsh soil begun to show the same tendency. The original object of his journeyings had been forgotten, and there was a vague uncertainty about it in the minds of the story-tellers, and an impulse to colour it with the ideas of Christianity. But at this critical point, while those ideas were still but dimly shaped, the ancient hero was thrust aside; and into the place of Brons and his son Alain there stepped, at first somewhat hesitatingly, the figures of Joseph of Barimaschie, *i. e.* ab Arimathea, and a son Josephes, with whom the story made it essential he should be provided. It now remains for us to trace out in somewhat greater detail the reason of this change of heroes, and how in the first instance it can have suggested itself.

#### § 7. THE BLEEDING LANCE AND JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA.

The Grail story is found devoid of Christian symbolism only in the Mabinogi of Peredur. That work contains no mention at all of the Grail vessel as such; and it is chiefly in the incidents of the hero's birth and boyhood that the likeness between it and Chrestien's portion of the Conte del Graal is found. There occurs, however, in the Peredur, one important incident which is repeated by all the Grail Romancers, almost without variation, except that, as time goes on it becomes more and more laden with Christian symbolism. This incident has been conveniently called "the Procession of Talismans."

Peredur, the prototype of Perceval in the Conte del Graal, comes to the castle of an uncle of his.

While he and the uncle are talking together, two youths enter the hall, bearing a mighty spear with three streams of blood flowing from the point to the ground; they are followed by two maidens bearing a salver in which is a man's head swimming in blood. This



form of the story has distinctly a more archaic tinge than the form which appears in Chrestien and his successors. It has a strong bearing on the general motif of the story, which, as Mr. Nutt has shown, turns more exclusively than does the *Conte del Graal* upon revenge for a kinsman's death, to which the hero is incited by the appearance of the Talismans.<sup>1</sup> The wailing and lamentation of all present seems more reasonable where the bleeding head is brought in, calling as it were for revenge, than in the *Conte del Graal*, where no such suggestion is attached to the emblems, and where the purpose of their appearance is indeed somewhat indefinite. Some critics have held the Procession as it appears in the *Mabinogi* to have been borrowed from the *Conte del Graal*. Undoubtedly the *Mabinogi* of Peredur as we have it existing in the *Red Book of Hergest*,—a MS. of the fourteenth century,—and in part, in MSS. a hundred years earlier, represents a Welsh translation from a French original probably itself based upon Welsh folk tales but imperfectly understood by their adapter. But allowing to the influence of the *Conte del Graal* some modification of the episode (such, for example, as a change in the persons of those who bear the Talismans) one has to postulate a less primitive version giving rise to a more primitive one, in order to accept Chrestien's *Graal*, “shining so that it puts out the light of the candles, as the sun does that of the stars,” as the sole prototype of the head swimming in blood; especially as in the latter case the incident occupies a more decidedly logical position in the tale than in the former.

Probably in both cases the incident is taken from the same original, the *Mabinogi* preserving the older form, Chrestien altering and adapting the episode in his own fashion. The Sword, it may be noted, does not in the *Mabinogi* play part in the procession, though it is brought into immediate touch with the other Talismans. For it is while Peredur is testing his strength by means of the sword, and when his arrival at two-thirds of his manhood has been proved, that the lance and salver appear, as it were summoning him to a practical test of that manhood by the revenge of his cousin's death.

Nor is this Procession of Talismans wholly without a counterpart elsewhere. In the Welsh *Mabinogi* of Branwen,—one of the so-called Four Branches of the *Mabinogion*, which undoubtedly represent a working up of materials of great antiquity,—we have a tale connected with Bran which seems to throw some light upon it.

<sup>1</sup> Nutt, p. 138 *et seq.*

Bendigeid Bran (the Blessed Bran) is wounded in the foot by a poisoned dart by some unnamed assailant: he commands his seven companions in war to cut off his head and carry it with them to the White Mount in London for burial. But they are to be long upon the way, and as they journey, "the head will be to you as pleasant company as ever it was when on my body." Whatever joy the head may have brought the seven comrades, grief is heavy upon those associated with them. Branwen, who sets out with them dies broken-hearted on the banks of the Alaw, for looking towards Ireland and towards the Islands of the Mighty, "Alas!" said she, "woe is me that I was ever born: two islands have been destroyed because of me." The multitude of men and women they meet bring them tidings of conquest and slaughter in their native land. The comrades themselves go on their way forgetful of all they have heard, remembering no sorrow whatever. This strange procession, with its strange burden, seems to throw at least some light of suggestion upon the talismanic procession as it appears in the Mabinogion, and still more weakened and attenuated in the other Romances. The indifference of the comrades may be due to the fact that they have fallen with their leader, and with him are journeying to the land of shades, while those weep and wail who see the procession pass, but are themselves left, leaderless and without hope, to the mercy of their enemies.

Yet another piece of evidence for the probable antiquity of this curious feature may be found in the fact that the Tuatha de Danann, who are in Irish tradition the leading representatives of the Celtic Pantheon and correspond to the Welsh Children of Dôn, have as part of their invariable equipment a sword, a spear (or lance) and a magic cauldron, the very same objects which we find associated together in the Romances.

The persistence of this feature, as time went on, and the manner in which it was enlarged and diversified according to the fancy of successive writers, seems to show that from the first it was a centre of interest and curiosity, and apparently of speculation—for, as has been shown, the first hint of the introduction of a Christian Legendary element which we have, is the identification of the Spear with that which Longinus used to pierce the side of Our Lord when He hung upon the Cross. The identification is a somewhat obvious one, given the fact, which we may infer from the subsequent development of the tales, that there was a desire upon the part of those writers

who had edification rather than mere frivolous entertainment at heart, to annex the whole delightful realm of tradition and romance and turn it to account in the furtherance of moral and religious education. And here, in the tales of Arthur and his Knights, of such undoubted popularity, and centring round a national hero, was an opportunity not to be lost.

The way in which, half-deliberately, half-unconsciously, it was brought to pass, is characteristic of an age when the historic sense was, as yet, absolutely undeveloped. Apart from, yet merging at many points into, the field of popular tradition, the Church (for we would take the prologue of the *Grand St. Graal* with its tale of monkish authorship somewhat literally, and find support in the evidences already referred to of the Latin originals from which the romancers in many cases seem to have worked)—the Church possessed its own wealth of legendary lore. How much of this had been in its time borrowed, like the jewels of Egypt, from enemies of the faith, the possessors were themselves probably ignorant, and mediæval hagiology bears pathetic witness. But in one case, at any rate, that now before us, we seem to see the process at work. There can be little doubt that the *Joseph Legend* did not originate with the North French adapters of the Celtic tales. The legend in its later developments concerns itself with the Conversion of England, and what is of more significance, Joseph himself was very early known to the Church of Britain in his legendary capacity, although there is no reliable trace of his having been regarded as the missionary apostle of England earlier than the Romances themselves.

The facts of Joseph's connection with Our Lord's passion, and of his imprisonment, which profess to supplement the Gospel narrative, are found in the Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, and in some briefer kindred works. There is evidence to show that this Gospel was well known in England several centuries before any prominent reference to it can be found in Continental writers. It included an account of Christ's Descent into Hades upon which the poet Cynewulf based his '*Harrowing of Hell*,' a poem which dates from the first quarter of the eighth century. The first reference to it in the literature of other lands is to be found in Gregory of Tours, but it is not met with again in France till we come to the *Grail Romances*.<sup>1</sup>

We have seen that in all probability the so-called procession of Talismans was a feature in the tales which underlie the *Conte del*

<sup>1</sup> Nutt, p. 221.

Graal and the Mabinogion. Let us suppose, then, that the mention of the bleeding spear suggested to some monkish compiler of these tales a possible embellishment; the spear had an earlier history, it was that wherewith Longinus pierced the side of Christ; or quite possibly this, as a simple and obvious idea, may in the first instance have become part of the oral tradition.<sup>1</sup> But, in whatever manner, this idea having come to the knowledge of our monkish compiler, let us suppose him to seek for further information in that Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus in which mention is made of the Longinus incident. There the most prominent figure is the well-known and favourite one of Joseph of Arimathea, "Benefactor Dei." Could not the connection be turned to account in his case? Supposing that in the description of the procession of Talismans found in the prototype of the Mabinogion the vessel itself in which the bleeding head was carried was a more prominent feature, our writer might well fix upon this as the object next in importance to the spear, through which this further connection was to be established. Given that the vessel had to do with Joseph, as the spear with the Roman soldier, what use could he have made of it, how come at its sad contents? It is noteworthy that, with that simplicity which disarms any accusation of irreverence, Gerbert, one of the two later continuators of the *Conte del Graal*, expressly declares that a potion with which Perceval's enemies, slain by day, are by night restored to life, was that one whereof Christ made use in the Sepulture.<sup>2</sup> To turn again to Joseph, the most dramatic and mysterious episode in his history is that of his imprisonment, on account of services rendered to the Lord's body. While he is in prison, he sees the holy vision in a great light, with a smell of myrrh. Now sweet odours and a bright light are two of the features which in the Romances are found to

<sup>1</sup> The Spear itself early became famous among the relics of Our Lord's Passion. Theodosius (sixth century) describes it as still to be seen in the Church of Golgotha, where "it shone by night as the sun by day." Arculf on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem (as Adamnan records in 686) saw the Spear with its shaft broken into two pieces, as well as the Cup of the Lord from which He drank after His Resurrection. (Wardle, '*Cymrodor*,' vol. xvi. p. 113.) It is a curious coincidence that about the 12th century the Crusaders began to bring from the East portions of the Holy Blood, that is at about the period when the Graal Romances were taking shape. The records of earlier pilgrimages do not call attention to this particular relic.

<sup>2</sup> Such an intermingling of ideas is not peculiar to the Graal Stories. In the *Life of S. David* ('*Lives of the Cambro-British Saints*'), David is said to have gone to Jerusalem with Teilo and Padarn to get their consecration, and to him was given the very tomb in which the Body of the Lord had lain. (See Wardle, '*Cymrodor*,' vol. xvii. p. 47.)



attend the appearance of the Grail, and which may well have had place in still earlier tales. Then again the miraculous feeding powers of the Grail, in yet another of its aspects, were quite sufficient to suggest to the mediæval mind the scenes of the Last Supper and the Holy Cup. In fact, just as we have seen the Grail to have gathered to itself, in the Romances, the various properties of the magic vessels of Celtic tradition, so, once the connection with Joseph of Arimathea was fortuitously established, in some such way as we have suggested, those varying aspects were one by one adapted to the purposes of Christian Symbolism, or connected with the scenes and incidents of Scriptural or Apocryphal history. How rapidly the process, once it had begun, was carried on may best be judged from the character of the later members of the Grail Cycle as compared with the *Conte del Graal*. And, indeed, when once Joseph had appropriated Lance and Cup, what was more probable than that the other attributes of their former possessor should also be transferred to one already so illustrious in the annals of the Church, and there take a more distinctly edifying shape? The Vessel of the Grail becomes the Cup of the Sacrament, the old Lance of the gods has pierced the side of Christ; Alain, who never wore a crown becomes Josephes, first Bishop of all Christendom; the realm of shadows is the heathen land of Britain; for the unceasing search for the treasures of wisdom we have the zeal of missionary enterprise and the salvation of souls. But we pay a heavy price for edification. With the entrance of Joseph on the scenes, the glamour fades away. We pass from the high regions of Faëry by a rapid descent to the levels of the commonplace and the ridiculous.







PR  
1119  
E5  
no.95

Early English Text  
Society  
[Publications]  
Extra series

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE  
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

---

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

---

CIRCULATE AS MONOGRAPH



